
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

5 days to improve your pronunciation

Day 1



There are 26 letters in the English alphabet but there are 44 sounds in the English language. This means that the number of sounds in a word is not always the same as the number of letters.

The word 'CAT' has three letters and three sounds but the word 'CATCH' has five letters but still only three sounds. If we write these words using phonemic symbols, we can see exactly how many sounds they have.

CAT is written /k æ t/

CATCH is written /k æ tʃ/

In 'CATCH' the three letters TCH are one sound represented by one phonemic symbol /tʃ/

Try the exercise below to help develop your knowledge of English pronunciation

Exercise

Look at the words below and put them into the correct column based on the number of sounds.

Clue:

The number of letters and the number of sounds is always different in these words.

horse	through	judge	enough	sugar
caught	island	daughter	knowledge	cupboard
cow	know	business	singing	more
carrot	chemist	treasure	thinking	laugh
heart	singer	thorough	door	check

2 sounds	3 sounds	4 sounds	5 sounds	6 sounds

Answers

2 sounds	3 sounds	4 sounds	5 sounds	6 sounds
cow /k aʊ/	horse /h ɔ: s/	singer /s ɪ ŋ ə/	carrot /k æ r ə t/	chemist /k e m ɪ s t/
know /n əʊ/	caught /k ɔ: t/	daughter /d ɔ: t ə/	island /aɪ l ə n d/	business /b ɪ z n ɪ s/
door /d ɔ:/	heart /h a: t/	thorough /θ ʌ r ə/	knowledge /n ɒ l ɪ dʒ/	thinking /θ ɪ ŋ k ɪ ŋ/
more /m ɔ:/	through /θ r u:/	enough /ɪ n ə f/	treasure /t r e ʒ ə/	
	judge /dʒ ʌ dʒ/	sugar /ʃ ʊ g ə/	singing /s ɪ ŋ ɪ ŋ/	
	laugh /l ɑ: f/		cupboard /k ʌ b ə d/	
	check /tʃ e k/			